

Historical Note

Duodenal ulcer, hyperacidity and J C Adams

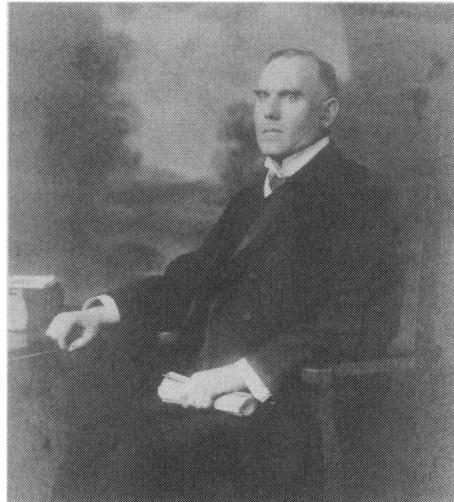
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Every medical student knows that duodenal ulcer is usually associated with hyperacidity and the cogniscenti believe that it was Lord Moynihan who first made this observation. We are indebted to Dr Hugh Baron for pointing out that the credit is, in fact, due to James Cowan Adams.¹

It was in 1911 that Adams submitted his MD thesis to the Queen's University of Belfast. Regrettably, the original has now disappeared, but Baron was able to read it in 1969 and now tells us that Adams had carefully studied 20 patients with proven duodenal ulcer. Fourteen of these, including many with pyloric stenosis, had hyperchlorhydria on the evidence of Ewald test meals. Hence Moynihan's much quoted figure of 70% for duodenal ulcer patients with hyperacidity.² Adams then wrote 'Hyperchlorhydria . . . is a condition of congestion, hyperaesthesia and hyperacidity . . . with intervals between attacks . . . It might be that after this condition had existed for some length of time an ulcer formed. In some cases there is a continuous and copious flow of saliva which is very distressing to the patient'. Adams had thus taken much further the classic observation of Schwarz — 'no acid, no ulcer'.³ It was about this time that A B Mitchell published an account of a series of nine operations for perforated duodenal ulcer carried out between 1904 and 1908 at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast, with no deaths — a remarkable achievement at that time.⁴ The first vagotomy in man was done by Exner in Germany in 1911, but the indication was to relieve the pain of tabetic crisis, not for duodenal ulcer.

Adams came from a family of County Antrim farmers and graduated from Queen's College in 1888. He spent the rest of his life in general practice at 212 Ravenhill Road, Belfast. He travelled widely to hospitals in both Europe and North America. Our present-day MD and PhD candidates will be surprised to learn that



Dr J C Adams (1871-1951), at the time of the award of his MD degree, 15 July 1911.

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he took no time off from his practice for his research. He did the work mostly at night. There were no Eastern Board or Royal Victoria Hospital Fellowships in those days! Many of his family have followed him into medicine and remember him as 'large, straight and rather stern'. Sir Ian Fraser describes him as big, burly, jovial and friendly. Perhaps he was a modest man, as he never published his work in any journal, or perhaps it was just that *curricula vitae* were not important in his time.

I am greatly indebted to Dr Hugh Baron for giving us this information and for his permission to quote freely from his paper. The photograph of her grandfather was supplied by Dr Sandra Redmond, Broughshane, Co Antrim.

REFERENCES

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3. Schwarz K. Über penetrierende Magen- und Jejunalgeschwüre. *Beitr Klin Chir* 1910; 67: 96-128.
4. Mitchell AB. Duodenal ulcer: its diagnosis and treatment, with illustrative cases. *Dubl J Med Sci* 1908; 125: 429-46.